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MISS SMITH : A PROTEST.

MISS SMITH, about to knock for admission at the doors of Judaism, has engaged counsel to argue her case, to make it clear that her conversion is not an "immoral" act. She wishes to become a Jewess because her intended husband is a Jew, and he "is unwilling to marry one not born a Jewess unless she consents to join his religion." With a true appreciation of the real question at issue, her counsel admits that, "as it is she who seeks Judaism, and not Judaism which seeks a convert, the onus of defending her action falls on her. It is she, and not Judaism, that must plead in justification." I readily accept the point; and though, like her counsel, I cannot speak in the name of Judaism, but only in my own name, out of anxiety for the future of my faith, and for the uninterrupted transmission of its distinctive teachings and ordinances, I venture to utter this protest against the acceptance of the justification, and will endeavour to show cause why the plea should be rejected. I will only pause to say that I sincerely congratulate Miss Smith upon having retained the services of so tactful and thoughtful an advocate. His skill and ability have certainly gained her a fair hearing, and won respect for her.

Miss Smith bases her claim to admission into the fold of Judaism upon the ground, mainly, that her intended husband has met her "half-way," and that thus there was every prospect of her becoming "as much of a Jewess as he is of a Jew." The statement of give and take underlying this description is no doubt true in fact. The man, in his desire to enter into marriage with Miss Smith, is perfectly willing to smooth away difficulties that offer a serious impediment to their union. He

goes forth to meet her, and drops on the road much of what is distinctly personal to a "conglomerate" Judaism. This satisfies the lady, and stands in vindication of her marrying one for whom she had to give up something; it satisfies him and forms his excuse for allying himself to one who is so anxious to remove obstacles to their agreement. But does it satisfy Judaism? It is Judaism that is to be satisfied, not the individual. The future bridegroom is presumably of the class labelled "liberal" Jew, and the liberal Jew and the liberal Christian, we are told, "finding that their actual religious opinions are closely similar, may argue that it is only an artificial barrier which separates their union." I confess, I would rather that the Jew here were not adjectived at all. It is Judaism—the religion of the Jew without an adjective—that will probably be affected more or less seriously, and I cannot clearly define to myself such a relation between the "liberal" Jew and an unadjectived Judaism, which connects him in anything more than race with the religion into which he was born. Religion is a matter of conviction. I have rarely been able to ascertain what are the convictions of the *liberal* Jew and to fix them. Mr. Abrahams describes them variously and negatively. They can neither be enumerated nor examined. We get lists of what they exclude, but these leave the mind uncertain. As a rule the matter reduces itself to a question of Jewish parentage. The liberal Jew our writer outlines is one who has thrown off the burden of every feature that differentiates Judaism from any other monotheistic belief; at best it can be said of him (and I do not lightly esteem the description) that he believes in one God and in leading a moral life. Generally he is unwilling to commit himself fully to both these confessions, his conception of a God at all being altogether hazy. But he acquiesces cordially in the virtue of morality. I do not know if it is intended that the "liberal Christian" advances towards him as far as this, so that they may meet

upon a common platform. If Miss Smith is this liberal Christian, few will blame her for fulfilling the condition antecedent to her marriage. I can see no stumbling-block to such a Jewess marrying such a Jew. This concerns them. But the real point raised, whether Judaism shall welcome to its fold one who would enter through the back-door and up the back stairs, is a grave one. A convert—to be worth anything to the new religion—must start with the conviction of the pre-eminence of that religion, and be imbued with something like an enthusiasm for its cardinal teachings. If the question is merely one of expediency (viz., whether it is expedient to turn a deaf ear to such applicants for admission into the fold), I give in at once. Not the religion, but the community in its corporate capacity, could not afford to turn adrift those asking to enter upon these terms. *It is not the religion which compounds the disloyalty of a lip-conversion, but the body politic.* Expediency—that mighty factor in the arrangement of human affairs—winks at it. But it is possible to conceive that expediency may have to face round; that the inexpedient to-day may become the urgently expedient to-morrow. Suppose, as our writer seems to foreshadow, these marriages—in the near future—increase largely; will it be an access of strength or an agent of weakness to the religion to have a following of an appreciable number of families resulting from these unions? Ezra showed no hesitation in his dealing with the difficulty when—in an aggravated form—it pressed itself upon him. It was hardly a question of maintaining the purity of the race with him: the religious aspect weighed heavily against the wives of heathen origin, even though they were presumably converted to Judaism. Suppose, I say, the prediction came to pass—are we prepared to reckon with the possible consequences? Miss Smith would no doubt argue through the mouth of her advocate that even then the effect would not be serious, because a certain sort of attachment did spring up between her and her adopted faith, or, in other words—her own—

"she did eventually feel that Judaism was a religion that offered enough to her to induce her to break even the feeble bonds that attached her to her past, and to accept a new spiritual future." Let us see, by her own showing, what "new spiritual future" her Judaism offers her.

The "new spiritual future" to which she awoke upon coming to closer quarters with Judaism was the result of the "charm" and the "novel" attraction which the observance of our religious ceremonies had for her. Hope and pride swell within us as we take in the meaning of this. We are not so proud of the novelty of the attraction as of its "charm." But the vanishing point of ceremony is reached when we are made to see it through her glasses. She is perfectly candid. She describes her circle with a straightforwardness and an appreciation of their religious practice which do her distinct credit, and speak eloquently of her powers of observation. She discriminates perfectly. "She found where these customs seriously interfered with convenience the customs mostly went to the wall." Precisely so; one begins to understand how it was she found it so easy to throw off the bonds of the past and accept such a new *spiritual* future. There is something absolutely comforting, and indeed convincing, in the religion which made convenience the head corner-stone of its fabric. "That her adoption of Judaism would involve the adoption of some strange customs she knew. She knew that she would be expected to keep the Passover, perhaps to fast on the Day of Atonement, and to learn a few words of Hebrew. But she had been to even so-called orthodox Synagogues in which 'leaven' had been moralised away, and she had heard from Jewish pulpits that fasting counted for very little." Has Miss Smith been fortunate enough to light upon the circle of the votaries of that *higher* Judaism which is all spirit and no body, and which while taxing the whole poetical faculty of the worshipper, leaves him free to live exactly—within the bounds of morality—according to his own inclination? If so, I can hardly conceive that her ac-

ceptance of its tenets opens out a really *new* spiritual future. But it is the unadjectived Judaism that she has presumably in view. If so, does it not breathe a contempt for that religious system to knock at its doors and claim admission with the confession upon the lips that the observances, which the average Jew holds as binding, it is permitted to "moralise" away? Is it because a Jewish preacher may take the opportunity upon Kippur of earnestly pleading with his flock, not to regard fasting as the be-all and end-all of the Day, that, therefore, it "counted for very little"? As well accuse Isaiah of an absolute scorn for the institution because his famous sermon brought to the front the moral, social and domestic duties—besides other religious obligations—which were included in a proper observance of the Atonement, and because he lashed those to whom it was a *fast* and nothing more! "The ceremonies of Judaism when lightly borne, as 'liberal' Jews bear them, thus even prove a charm rather than a deterrent to an outsider." Does the charm consist in viewing them at a distance, and having nothing to do with them? Does the "liberal" Jew who throws them overboard also find a charm in them? It would be interesting to have his statement.

The rest of the argument reveals unexpected "points" and cleverly summarised contentions. The way Miss Smith proves that Judaism was not a belief in which she passively concurred, but that it was a system actively "enticing" to her, is a neat bit of reasoning, only the reader must start from her standpoint. I confess I am scarcely able to decide what that standpoint is. I have not been able to conjure up a clear picture of the would-be convert who "felt more and more drawn to the prayer-book used in the *Cheder* of the *Chevra*;" "who was at first astonished, afterwards charmed, to hear that traditional Judaism thought a good deal more of tradition than it did of the Bible"; whose views coincided with those of the man she met, who had outgrown the old notion of inspiration with Moses as its mouthpiece; who accepted the dictum of this up-to-date Jew

that Mosaism was "only as a link in religious tradition," and who had something like a sneer—certainly a dramatic "perish the thought!"—for a Judaism based upon the "half-truths, whole errors, and superstitions" of the Pentateuch. Talk about a "conglomerate" Judaism, here is a conglomerate Jewess with a vengeance! What is a simple man like myself to make of such an embodiment, or of the "ragged" answer given to prove that this Judaism which refused to write itself out in a book was not an invention of the individual, but a living, religious corpus with a nervous spirituality animating and sustaining it? The reply is not so "ragged" as it is described. It is a thoughtful summary of a new Judaism, a Judaism which claims not to be esoteric, but for the multitude. When the multitude grasp it, and live up to its ideals, Miss Smith and all her class will be welcomed with open arms, and will enter our ranks with a flourish of trumpets. But not till then. Judaism—the Judaism which still lives in the hearts of those for whom it is an active agent (not a philosophy to be dreamed about), and who have not yet moralised away its practices and observances—is not so cordial in its reception of Miss Smith, because, frankly, it fears her. It fears her influence over the generation to come, over the future of Judaism. What will be the conceptions of the religion of the offspring of such a marriage as Miss Smith proposes? Theorising may do for the grown-ups, but we want children to *practise* something. (We have all known converts who have entered the pale of our faith for just such reason as actuates Miss Smith, and who have, as time went on, honestly accepted the distinctive doctrines of Judaism, and whose household and home teachings could scarcely be distinguished from the Jewish-born matron's. But these have not been Miss Smiths, who have philosophically analysed their religious bent and thoughts, and arrived at definite conclusions made to square with Judaism. It is the convert holding convictions such as have been described in the confessions

before us who is dangerous.) Jews, as we have remarked before, cannot say to one born within their faith (whatever his practices may be) "We will not accept the lip-convert you propose to marry." But Judaism, to secure the uninterrupted transmission of its tenets, is bound to raise this protest for fear it be understood by the general reader that such conversions are welcomed, are regarded in the light of a missionary victory, and that Israel's sons, who select wives with these convictions, are in the van of a propaganda to universalise Judaism. I believe in the mission of our race, that in such mission is included the duty of making converts ; but Miss Smith must alter her opinions before I would regard her as eligible for admission into the fold of Judaism.

DAVID FAY.
